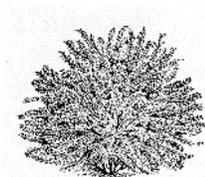


# *Berberis thunbergii* - Japanese Barberry (*Berberidaceae*)

*Berberis thunbergii* is a popular but spiny small shrub. Japanese Barberry is very fine-textured and very urban tolerant, with a wide selection of foliage color variants. It is often used as a single specimen, in group or mass plantings, or as a low thorny informal border.

## Form

-small ornamental shrub



cultivars

-slow growth rate

## Culture

-full sun to partial sun

-adaptable to poor soils, various soil pHs, soil compaction, drought, and pollution

-propagated by rooted stem cuttings

-few disease or pest problems

-moderately to abundantly available as different cultivars, primarily in container form; however, the species form is rarely available

## Foliage

-red, yellow, green, and variegated foliage forms are all available



-alternate leaves are spatulate to obovate, with the base very drawn out, being cuneate to linear but having no petiole  
-margins are entire  
-autumn color is variable, being orange- to wine-colored in late autumn for green- or red-foliaged

forms, and yellowish-green to off-yellow for golden-foliaged forms

## Flowers

-yellow, in late Apr. and early May, in pendulous clusters directly from the stems

-not showy from a distance but attractive when viewed close-up, and attracting many bees

## Fruits

-red ellipsoid small fruits are sparse to rare on the cultivars, but often persist into the following spring

-can be attractive when viewed up-close, but are almost never dense enough to be showy

## Twigs

-zigzag, thin, and lightly grooved; small, scaly buds

-single, thin, small spines occur along the stems

-stems, branches, and roots are brittle and easily

broken when bent, pushed against, or during transplanting, revealing a bright yellow interior wood

## USAGE

### Function

-specimen shrub, facer shrub, or edging shrub (for the smaller-sized cultivars)

-formal hedge, informal hedge, or barrier shrub (for the larger-sized cultivars, or the species form)

### Texture

-fine texture in foliage and when bare

-thick density in foliage and when bare

### Assets

-cultivars available in several vibrant foliage colors

-urban stress tolerant

-slow-growing and of small mature size

-amenable to shearing

### Liabilities

-spines (if they are not desired)

-garbage collector to blowing trash and leaves, along the lower stems

-brittle stems

### Habitat

-Zones 4 to 8, including all variants listed below, but not performing as well in the humidity of hotter climates

-Native to Japan

## SELECTIONS

### Alternates

-urban tolerant, deciduous, spiny shrubs serving as hedges or barriers (*Acanthopanax sieboldianus*, *Berberis x mentorensis*, *Rosa rugosa*, etc.)

### Cultivars – Variants – Related species

-Bonanza Gold™ - a new introduction with bright golden yellow foliage in full sun, not subject to leaf scorch (as is the standard golden cultivar 'Aurea'), maturing at 1.5' x 3'

-'Kobold' - kelly green foliage in spring, maturing to dark green by late summer, maturing at 2' x 2'

-*B. thunbergii* var. *atropurpurea* - Red Japanese Barberry - similar to the species form in growth habit (upright, then arching) and size (5' x 5'), but with red-purple to maroon summer foliage color, and best placed in full sun :

-'Crimson Pygmy' (also known as 'Nana' or 'Atropurpurea Nana') - the most common Barberry, and one of the most common of all ornamental shrubs, very slowly maturing at 2' x 3', with deep red-wine spring and summer foliage when properly placed in full sun, climaxing as an orange-red autumn color in good years; please note that, in partial sun to partial shade, the foliage color takes on a bronzy-green, rather than red-maroon color; in fact, to see firsthand the color transition, peek within the self-shaded portions of the shrub, or turn a leaf over and look at its pale-colored underside

-'Rose Glow' - a variegated mixture of pink and maroon splotches, with new foliage much lighter in color than more seasoned foliage, with an upright then arching growth habit, maturing at 5' x 5'